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BIG, GRAINEY PICTCHAS

by

Marc I. Miller
Candidate for the Master of Fine
Arts Degree in the College of
Photographic Arts & Sciences of
the Rochester Institute of
Technology.

August 8, 1973

Bradley Hindson
Assistant Professor
S.P.A.S.
R.I.T.

Andrew Davidhazy
Assistant Professor
C.C.E.
R.I.T.

Henry C. Beck
Professor
S.P.A.S.
R.I.T.

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THESIS PROPOSAL

for
The Master of Fine Arts Degree

College of Graphic Arts and Photography
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences

ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

BIG, Grainey Pictchas

PURPOSE:

To interpret photographic textural and spacial characteristics in a group of images of heightened (surreal or subjective) realities through a photo-pointillist approach.

Submitted by:

Marc I. Miller

March 28, 1973

Thesis Board:

Chief Advisor

Bradley Hindson
Assistant Professor
S.P.A.S.

Associate Advisors

Henry C. Beck
Professor
S.P.A.S.

Andrew Davidhazy
Assistant Professor
C.C.E.

SCOPE OF THE THESIS:

The idea of definition of texture (surface) and space in the photograph was born of a renewed interest in painting (especially Pointillism and Neo-Realism) and of directions in my own work with the heightened reality.

The "straight" black-and-white print defines itself through a system of space and texture (light), understood generally by parameters of visual experience. I wish to produce a group of images in which these traditional interpretations of texture and space are defined as a function of the viewer. The image serves as a graph of experience reduced to a surface grain pattern, thereby making space a function of interpretation of texture. The prints will be large and the viewer permitted only a short viewing distance so that each person, placed in a restricted viewing situation, works to establish patterns or accepts the image on its own terms as an experience in visual re-orientation.

PROCEDURES:

Prior to the production of the images, I am studying the paintings of the Pointillists, Neo-Realists and Impressionists as well as photography from various sources.

The Thesis will be a group (approximately 15) of images about 26" X 39" each. Color will be applied to parts of each print to enhance perception and reaction. The prints will be mounted (possibly framed) and hung within a limited viewing area.

The process demands extensive and extremely selective image making as well as maximum technical proficiency in the production of the negatives, prints and the application of color.

The Thesis report will cover in detail the execution of the work as to processes, techniques, problems encountered and research done.

Research sources include the Thesis board; R.I.T., Memorial Art Gallery and other libraries; museums and galleries; contact with painters and other photographers; and other inputs I can obtain.

This project is for me an important growth experience. It is taking me into new and exciting areas of aesthetic and technical development. I believe it will offer many people a unique perceptual experience and help in some way to broaden lines of visual understanding.

The first part (PHASE I) of this document is a collection of "notes to myself", made during the production of the work.

"I'm a nervous wreck from Rochester Tech
and a hell of a Photo man....."

Old Folk Tune

I sometimes like to sit in the dark, with
the wind outside and with Brahms trios,
or Beethoven sonatas or Bach fugues. I
begin to feel Allspace and MySpace.

What is the image? Interesting? I have to look - at what? - at a world in parts not before seen - at myself - time to let it out and let it in.

Black/Night has all/no depth.

FOTOGRAPHY: The First Commandment

Your Camera's Your Buddy;
Your Camera's Your Pal.

Working tight. Very tight. Tight. Pack the grain together. Compose in the center circle. Tight.

Make some prints. See what they look like. Tight.

2475 at 1000 in D-19 at 3 minutes with reg. agit. Negatives grainy. Top end slushy. Not so hot.

Idea: To make an easel out of matte board and styrofoam. I need it to be 30" X 40".

RE: Idea - Easel works fine.

Shooting.

Not Shooting.

Shooting.

Not getting the images I want. Have to buy some Instant Kharma.

On the tech side:

Rated film at 250 ASA. D-72 for 3 minutes at 68 . Up on the curve. Grain good. Printing center of negative up to 24" X 36". IMAGE QUALITY UNDESIREABLE. Next - rated film at 4000 ASA. Dev. at 80 - slush.

Poly-Rapid N RC.....is the paper that's.....
(you sing the rest.)

What does "up on the curve" really mean?

I'm looking at lots of painting. The areas that most concern me are Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, Expressionism, Realism, Neo-Realism and Surrealism. Later for this.

Considering thoughts on the definitive part which gives rise to the whole.

Ten weeks of work - nothing close yet to what I want.

Today I looked closely at Profile of Woman Posing by Georges Seurat (1898). I saw in it an image similar to one I had just printed. But the texture - how to get the texture. I decided to relax, rethink, reticulate.

2475 at 250-400 ASA in DK-50 for 9 minutes (68).

Thanks to Toulouse-Lautrec for some new perspectives.

Subjective Mental Involvements:

1. Reality "behind" reality.
2. Space/Time transitions.
3. Personal understandings.

Pressure is being released. There is a method.

Developed film today. I have a negative that makes me smile.

"The Painter-Poet feels that what is true, immutable and essential stems from the unseen. His elation is not transitory, because it is not of a physical order, even if the faculties of the senses are his accessory instruments. He feels himself to be a plastic microcosm in indirect contact with everything."

Carlo Carra¹

¹•Metaphysical Art. Massimo Carra. New York, Praeger, 1971. pp 37.

PHASE II

Technical Round-up (or How I Done It)

PART A

Both the technical and aesthetic dimensions of this project began from about the same point. I had been photographing in a surreal or "tableau" fashion for about a year. I had become concerned with the reaction to the "documentariness" of the image; in other words, people were looking at the photographs as documents or recordings. They took the images as "real" due to their own textural or spacial programming and were unable to deal with the tableau.

So I became concerned with removing the more traditional textural and spacial characteristics from my images.

I decided to break the texture down to one pattern idea.

Grain was the obvious starting point.

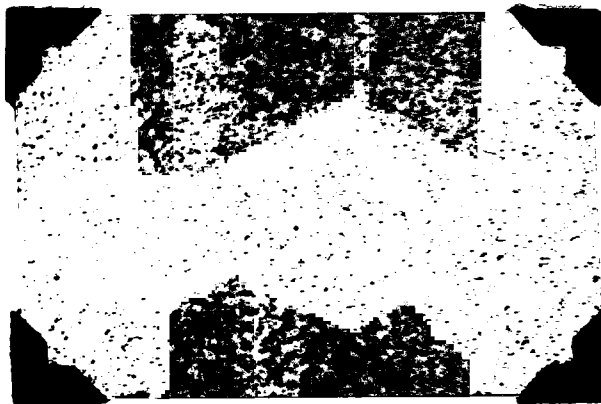
I chose Kodak 2475 recording film because of its ability to hold shadows and highlight detail and inherent large grain capability.

I also decided to compose in and print the center of the frame, so that when blowing it up I would further stretch the texture. 26" X 39" was chosen as the original size.

The paper I chose was Polycontrast Rapid RC in N surface and it came in rolls 40" wide. This paper, with its resin coating, allowed for short washing times and quick air drying, for the dryers available to me were not large enough. The N surface facilitated the coloring (the oils must be applied to a matte surface) and at such a large print size, the reflectivity of the glossy (F) surface would have been bothersome.

I will get into the coloring in PART B.

My first test was with 2475 rated at 1000 (recommended) ASA. I developed this in D-19 at 3 minutes - 68 - with regular agitation. I produced graininess of a slushy quality.



Next, I rated the film at 250 ASA and went to D-72 as a developer. 68 for 3 minutes. The grain was better. However, when I blew up the negative, the overall quality of the image was undesirable. (Turn page for illustration.)



It did not have the feeling I was seeking.

I also rated the film at 4000 ASA and developed for 3 minutes in D-72 at 80 . It was again not what I wanted.



The contrast I was getting was bad. I realized I could not realistically expect to print with contrast filters in the enlarger because that would necessitate incredibly long exposure times and bring on the accompanying problems of safe light fog and enlarger vibration.

My printing at this time was done with a point light source, in order to shorten exposure times and sharpen grain edges.

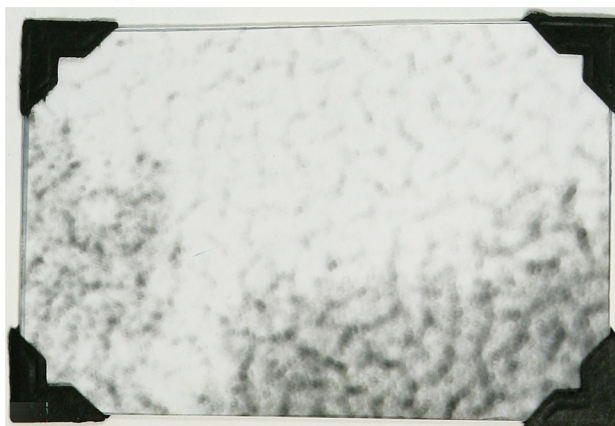
At this point I was still unable to reduce texture while holding sharpness and hold good contrast in the negative.

The answer to both problems came almost simultaneously. I realized that I would have to separate the functions. I would work for large, tight grain and contrast in the negative and impose the new texture upon it. I rejected texture screens immediately as the texture would be too regular and I would need to have many different screens so all the prints would not look the same.

I decided to try reticulation.

I began to work for a full negative by exposing 2475 at ASA 250-400 and developed in DK-50 at 68 for 9 minutes. This provided a dense negative with good contrast.

I was able to produce a reticulation in the superficial layer of the emulsion by subjecting the film to five reticulating baths (175 - 55) at 10 second intervals.



I discovered that the reticulation was stronger and more visible in the upper zones of the print, so I worked for a minimum amount of shadow and black areas in the negative.

I was now able to print without a filter and have exposures of under 5 minutes. The prints had excellent tonal range and the reticulation pattern reduced the texture to a surface plane.

PART B

The prints were colored with Marshalls Photo Oils and Marshalls Photo Pencils.

I would take a dab of whatever color I chose and add another dab of extender and a dab of titanium white. This caused greater reflectivity in the color.

Color Alone

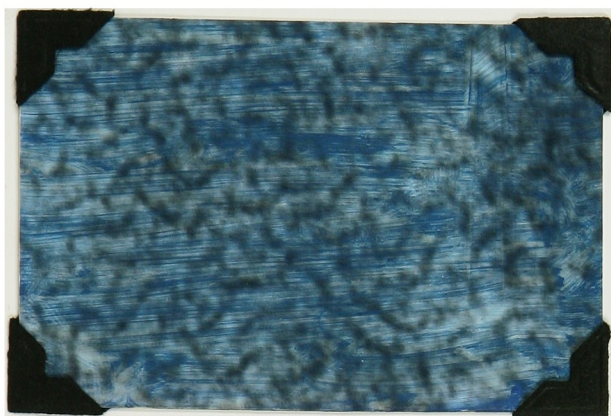


Color, White & Extender

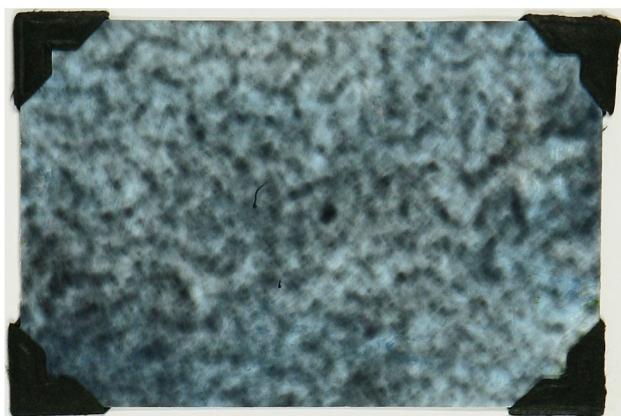


After the oil is applied, it is smoothed out and lightened by cotton or Q-tips.

Applied



Smoothed

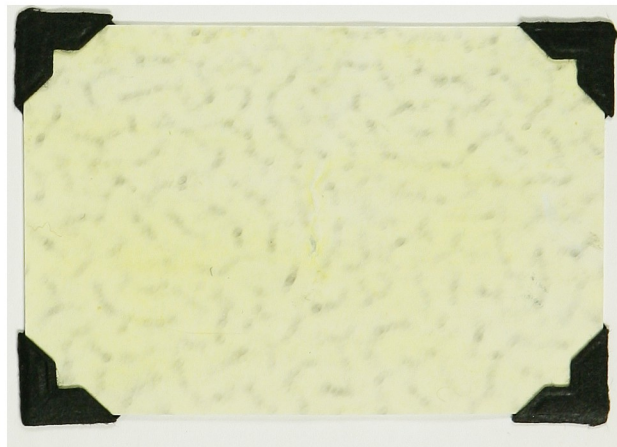


The edges are cleaned by a kneadable eraser or by Marshalls PM Solution. After the oils dried I sprayed the prints with Lacquer-Mat #2 Spray to remove the oiliness and intensify the color.

Before Spray



After Spray



The colors were chosen strictly by my own feelings and applied in intensities dependent on those feelings.

PHASE III

I have been concerned for awhile with the photograph as "heightened reality", or what Nietzsche, in The Birth of Tragedy, calls the "symbolic dream picture", in which it is revealed to the artist his oneness with the primal source of the universe - that beneath reality is another reality.

Through a renewed interest in painting, especially the work of Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, Expressionist, Realist and Surrealist painters, I began to develop new ideas for images. I felt that my photographs should be more of an extension of my conscious (cerebral) processes. I became involved with juxtaposing people and environments, with creating new worlds within worlds, or realities behind other realities. In painting, the artist is not subjected to the instantaneous literal feedback that comes from looking at a photograph - "Oh, it's a man in a chair". When approached on this level, most photographs fall into the common denominator of the Daily News. I decided to charge the viewer with some additional responsibility; that is, to reconstruct the "textures" of objects to make the pictures literal. I believe for any photograph to fall under the bedraggled banner of Fine Art, the image must transcend the literal. Many do, in fact I think that it is, in many cases, the viewers (or the photographers) who hold the photographs back.

"Photographers should not be 90% eyes and 10% brain. I think they should be 90% brain and 10% eyes...They (photographers) never make things happen themselves. Well, what I'm doing is really creating my own private world and making my own thing happen. I'm not relying on that accidental event. And to me that's a more beautiful direction to go." ²

And to me...in these images I worked to create a series of "moments of no time", some of which function as "graphs of experience", i.e., the viewer is able to reconstruct the texture and then "interpret" the photograph as an "event" or "story". Other images are emotional or psychological responses to paintings or feelings or thoughts.

I used color for a few reasons: to enhance light, to insinuate or separate planes of space and texture and also because the use of selected color would further separate the image from an immediate "reportage" approach from the viewer.

The images were a set of "heightened realities", or realities behind others. The traditional textures and colors (tones) were broken down so that the viewer, by choosing his viewing distance, would be able to reconstruct texture and space on his own terms. This allows the viewer to accept many levels of interpretation (if he so chooses).

². "Conversations with Duane Michals", Image, Vol. 14, No.1, January 1971.

I referred to the technique employed in the surface structure as "photopointillism". This was a way of expressing the textural breakdown I had achieved in terms most closely related to painting.

In the nineteenth century, photographs attempting to resemble paintings were termed "pictorial" or "painterly". It is my belief that, in most cases, both the medium of still photography and painting come under the heading of graphic arts and I see no area of subject matter forbidden to either. Each medium has its own identity and its own materials for the artist to do with as he wishes.

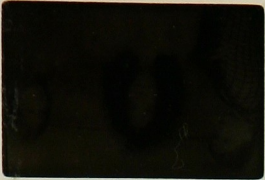
It is under a twentieth century pictorial premise that these images were made. That is, in the nineteenth century I was romantic and pastoral; now I am metaphysical and schizophrenic.

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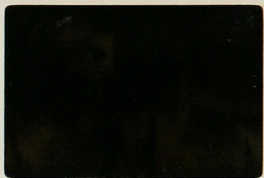
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